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Learning to Pray the Pentecostal Way:
Language and Personhood on the Zambian Copperbelt

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Abstract:

This article examines the role of prayer in the production of the Pentecostal person on the Zambian Copperbelt. While Pentecostal prayer is partly focused on private concerns, and therefore reinforces a classic Protestant notion of bounded, individualised personhood, success in this practice depends on a believer's ability to incorporate the language of the Pentecostal community more generally. Prayer is also therefore dependent on a model of personhood in which permeability has an important part to play. One of the implications of this latter element of Pentecostal prayer is that it turns individual believers into iconic representations of their communities.

Key Words:

Pentecostalism, prayer, personhood, individualism, permeability

*A prayer is not just the effusion of a soul,
a cry which expresses a feeling.
It is a fragment of a religion.
In it one can hear the echo of numberless phrases;
it is a tiny piece of literature,
it is the product of the accumulated efforts
of men and women over generations*

- Marcel Mauss, *On Prayer*

Bana Chanda¹ often brought her young son Tim with her to prayer meetings at Higher Calling, a Pentecostal fellowship on the Zambian Copperbelt where she was a regular attendee. Tim was notably patient with the long stretches of prayer, sitting quietly on a wooden bench while all around him believers shouted, clapped their hands, and paced the room. However, Tim told his mother that he would not sit anywhere near Gwen, as he found her prayers too frightening. In this opinion, Tim was not alone. While Pentecostals are not usually uncomfortable with ecstatic demonstrations during religious services, there was something about Gwen's prayers that made many people at Higher Calling uneasy. When Gwen prayed she would shake and shudder, keening and lurching forward in her seat. Sometimes she would fall to her knees, arms and voice raised high. Bana Chanda shared her son's fear of Gwen with me during a longer conversation about why she felt that Gwen should not be allowed to come to Higher Calling meetings, or at the very least that she should be kept under more careful control. In her outline of the problems with Gwen's prayers, Bana Chanda included what we will see was a rather surprising addition. According to Bana Chanda, Gwen's characteristic shudder was something she had copied from Bana Rachel, an erstwhile leader at Higher Calling who, it was true, used to shudder and shake in prayer in a way that was very similar to Gwen.

At first glance, Bana Chanda's comments appear to echo the well documented Protestant concern, shared by charismatic and Pentecostal Christians, with the importance of sincerity in religious practice (e.g. Keane 2007, Shoaps 2002). However, while there is no doubt that authenticity has historically been a central concern for many Christians, I want to argue that something else is going on in Bana Chanda's critique of Gwen. To wit, what upset Bana Chanda about Gwen's prayer was not the possibility that it was not authentic or sincere, but rather that her prayers were symbolic of the serious problems that Higher Calling was facing as a congregation. In order to make this claim, my focus in the following analysis will be on the role of prayer in the formation and composition of the Pentecostal person. As we will see, praying – and praying in a particular way – is a central aspect of being a Pentecostal on the Copperbelt. The process through which people develop their abilities in this type of prayer forms them into Pentecostal believers; it also makes them into iconic representations of their religious communities. My analysis in this article contributes to the growing literature on Pentecostal personhood (see Klaitz 2011), and more specifically to the question of whether we can speak of a Pentecostal believer as a bounded or permeable subject – as an individual or dividual, to take up the language that is sometimes used here (e.g. Daswani 2011).

I begin my discussion with a brief outline of the literature on Pentecostal personhood before turning my attention to Pentecostal prayer on the Copperbelt, first through a more general description and subsequently by exploring how new members of Pentecostal churches learn to pray. What emerges from this ethnographic discussion is a particular model of personhood. On one level, prayer in Pentecostal churches reflects those studies of Protestant prayer that have connected direct communication with God to a bounded, individualised self. However, in the particular context of the Copperbelt, this aspect of Pentecostal prayer is made to depend on a kind of permeability, on the capacity of believers to absorb the words of their religious communities. It is in the light of this analysis of Pentecostal prayer that we can understand the problem that Gwen presented to members of Higher Calling, and I conclude by returning to her story.

My argument in this article turns on a practice that I call, 'collective-personal prayer.' A feature of Pentecostal ritual life throughout the world, this practice is exactly what it sounds like: everyone gathered prays out loud at the same time. This results in a cacophony of petitions that on the Copperbelt includes various Zambian languages, as well as English, and occasionally glossolalia. Believers engage in collective-personal prayer during spontaneous gatherings with friends and when praying together with their families. Collective-personal prayer is also the most important part of formal ritual life (see Haynes n.d.). When Copperbelt Pentecostals gather for worship, whether for Sunday morning services or Bible study meetings in a believer's home, more time is devoted this type of prayer than to any other activity, except perhaps the sermon.

Collective-personal prayer has a sound all its own. Walking through Nsofu, the neighbourhood where I carried out my fieldwork,² one can tell immediately if there is a Pentecostal meeting in a particular house, as the staccato echo of clapping hands and blended voices floats out to the street through windows opened against the heat. Apart from its distinctive aural qualities, the other crucial feature of collective-personal prayer is that it takes place over long stretches of time, and it is not unusual for believers to pray in this way for an hour or more during a Pentecostal meeting. As we will see, this requires considerable stamina. I will return to a discussion of Copperbelt Pentecostal prayer in a moment. First, however, allow me to briefly examine the literature on prayer and personhood, which will inform the analysis that follows.

Prayer and the Pentecostal Person

One cannot engage in a discussion of Pentecostal personhood without addressing the question of individualism. In the light of the history of social scientific discussions of the person, this is no surprise. Scholars have long associated the rise of the western individual – 'the independent, autonomous, and thus essentially nonsocial moral being,' in Louis Dumont's (1986: 25) fine definition – with the development of Christianity, especially Protestantism. This was certainly the case for Dumont's teacher, Marcel Mauss, who serves as one of our key interlocutors in this special issue. In his last published essay, Mauss

(1985) argued that the modern idea of the person was in large part indebted to Christian moral categories. These distinctions were in a sense refined with the Protestant tradition, which emphasised individual communication with God, further delimiting the person as a bounded entity. This argument echoes some of the concerns of Mauss' unfinished doctoral dissertation (Mauss 2003), which traces the development of prayer alongside the evolution of religion. As religion moved from mechanical to spiritual, Mauss argued, prayer also moved from collective to individualistic (see Allen 1985: 34-35).

By hitting on prayer as particularly important to the creation of the Protestant person, Mauss anticipated one of the most fruitful (if occasionally confining (see Handman in press)) lines of analysis in the anthropology of Christianity by a century. Because God can see inside a person, can apprehend all her desires and feelings and intentions, prayer demands a particular kind of speaking subject – namely, one who is sincere, whose internal sentiments and external expressions match up perfectly (Shoaps 2002; Robbins 2001; Keane 2002, 2007; also see Bialecki 2011). Here, the notion of the Christian person as defined by her own thoughts and feelings, as an individual who is bounded and distinct from others, emerges especially clearly. Faced with the demands of a sincere speaking subject, the close correlation between Christian adherence and individualism cannot be denied.

Alongside these observations, however, anthropologists have also increasingly emphasised the permeability of the Christian person (Mosko 2010; Coleman 2006, 2009, 2011; Reinhardt 2014, Eriksen 2012). Turning our attention to Africa in particular, discussions of permeability have largely been divided between two primary concerns. The first of these is the vulnerability of individual believers to malevolent spirits (e.g. Gifford 2004, Meyer 1995, van de Kamp 2011). Ancestors, jealous neighbours, or past lovers may easily bring a curse on a believer, perhaps because she has neglected her obligations to her family, perhaps because she has become too successful. It is in the light of these dangerous social connections that deliverance from demons (i.e. exorcism) occupies such a prominent position in Pentecostal practice. Deliverance also points to a second way in which African believers can be described as permeable persons, namely in their dependence on powerful church leaders. Here, one of the most striking examples comes from Richard Werbner's (2011) discussion of charismatic healers in Botswana, whose skill is derived in large part from their ability to enter into another person's suffering, to take pain into their own bodies in an effort to divine its source. Identification with religious leaders through this kind of consubstantiality is therefore the key to freedom from the various ailments that follow from consubstantiality with evil spirits.

In reality, of course, Pentecostal personhood is neither completely individualist nor completely dividualist,³ but is instead characterised by a complex interplay between boundedness and permeability. Believers seek deliverance, hoping to make a break with the spirits they have inherited from their ancestors, but may also comply with their families' wishes that they honour those ancestors, choosing to open themselves up to communion with kin both living and dead (Daswani 2011). Believers enact a Christian personhood through the practice of

confession, and in so doing work to sever the link between themselves and the powers of darkness, but confession also depends on Christian others to help constitute and complete the Christian self (Pype 2011). It is in the light of these observations that Girish Daswani urges scholars to give more attention to ‘the different ways in which the Christian self emerges relationally’ (Daswani 2011: 275). This is precisely what I aim to do in this article. In particular, what I want to show is that by learning to pray the Pentecostal way new believers are incorporated into a shared mode of religious practice that both forms and defines them as Pentecostals. The model of personhood that emerges from an analysis of this kind of prayer is one in which an individual believer does not cease to exist as a bounded, recognizable entity – a fact that will become especially important in the conclusion. Prayer is still individualised, a conversation between a believer and God, and even when it is done out loud in public, as in the context of collective-personal prayer, it includes things that are meant for God alone to hear. That being said, while individual believers are not eclipsed by the relationships in which religious participation embeds them, we will see that their identity as Pentecostals is in large part constituted by their ability to mobilise the linguistic resources of their community in prayer. As such, we can say that they are not only bounded, but also composite persons whose religious practice comes to reflect a wider network of believers, thereby turning them into icons of their religious communities.⁴

‘Where do you pray?’

On the Copperbelt, the Bemba verb ‘to pray’ (*ukupepa*) is often used as a shorthand term for religious membership (cf. Pype 2011: 295). For instance, someone might indicate that she was a Catholic by saying, ‘I pray at the Catholic church’ (*ndapepa ku Katolika*). Similarly, when asking where a person goes to church, one asks literally, ‘Where do you pray? (*Mupepa kwisa?*)’. While I do not want to make too much of this linguistic convention, it is worth pointing out that Pentecostals have expanded this particular usage. Among believers, the language of prayer is used to denote not only religious affiliation, but religious adherence as well. So, for example, when a person says, ‘I could never stop praying’ (*tetinleka ukupepa*), she means she could never leave Pentecostal practice behind. Likewise, when wanting to communicate that someone is a committed believer, a Pentecostal may simply say, ‘He prays.’ In the popular shorthand, then, prayer has come to express Pentecostal identity, and for Copperbelt believers prayer is central to – perhaps even metonymic of – religious life.

Although Pentecostals do not deny that God can hear someone who prays ‘in his heart,’ this is not the way that my informants generally pray. During my fieldwork I lived in the home of a Pentecostal leader who I refer to as Pastor Mwanza. He and his wife, who had also trained as a pastor, oversaw an Nsofu congregation that I call Key of David. While eating dinner one evening, Mrs Mwanza remarked that lately she had noticed a difference in the way she was inclined to pray. ‘These days, I just feel like praying like this,’ she said, bowing her head low over hands clasped in her lap, a look of quiet contemplation on her face. Pastor Mwanza took one look at his wife’s proposed prayer posture and

quickly responded: 'Then you have stopped being a Pentecostal.' Clearly, in the eyes of this church leader audible prayer was essential to what it meant to be a believer. Pastor Mwanza practiced what he preached, and I grew accustomed to hearing him and his wife praying in their room each morning, the steady hum of their voices floating down the corridor of our house, blending together as the couple formed the smallest possible unit of collective-personal prayer.

In the above discussion we have so far identified two key features of Pentecostal practice on the Copperbelt. Being a Pentecostal means praying, and more specifically praying out loud. There are certainly believers who have no qualms about doing this alone. Most memorable for me in this regard was the daily practice of one of the Mwanza's neighbours, who would awaken each morning at 4:30 to pray loudly – very loudly – for his family, health, and finances. When I lived in the Copperbelt city of Chingola I had a similar neighbour, whose nighttime battles with the powers of darkness had a large audience in our apartment complex.

While there are some believers who are obviously not bothered by the prospect of praying out loud when they are by themselves, most of my informants said that they found it difficult to pray alone, and that they preferred to pray at Pentecostal gatherings. Part of the problem was that when they were at home they felt they were easily sidetracked by housework or visitors. In contrast, believers described formal ritual contexts as spaces that allowed for long stretches of prayer without distraction. What's more, collective-personal prayer has the advantage of providing believers with a degree of privacy. In a densely populated neighbourhood like Nsofu, this is a no small consideration. Houses are close together and usually inhabited by at least half a dozen people; under such circumstances, it is difficult to say anything without someone overhearing. Speaking to a group of women from Higher Calling, Bana Chanda related how hard it was for her to pray at home, as she shared a house with her mother and children. She told us that she and her daughter had once tried to pray with the television on to muffle the sound of their voices, but Bana Chanda didn't seem to find this a very effective solution. For people who live in very close quarters with non-believers, the auditory insulation provided by other voices raised in collective-personal prayer is an important element of this practice. This is especially true in the light of the fact that Pentecostals are often praying about rather sensitive topics, perhaps the conversion of a wayward spouse, and these are things they do not want a neighbour or visiting mother-in-law to hear.

The fact that the privacy provided by collective-personal prayer is part of its attraction highlights the individualised and individualising aspects of this practice. When believers describe their decisions to become Pentecostals, they often point out that one advantage of Pentecostal prayer over prayer in other Christian contexts is that it gives them an opportunity to approach God directly with their personal requests. In the mainline denominations where many of my informants grew up, group prayer usually meant that one person stood in front of the church and prayed out loud while everyone else was only allowed to pray quietly 'in their hearts.' Bana Junior, a Pentecostal woman who was raised in the Anglican Church, found this arrangement very unsatisfactory. 'How,' she asked,

‘does that person know the problems I have? How can he pray for me properly?’ In contrast, in Pentecostal meetings, Bana Junior was able to bring her concerns directly to God. As Bana James, a young Pentecostal woman explained, in Pentecostal prayer you are able to tell God things that you could never tell anyone else.

In these initial observations, collective-personal prayer emerges as a shared but largely private activity, one in which an individual is aurally cut off from those around her and through which she is able to voice her most personal burdens. Insofar as this is the case, we can say that the model of personhood that accompanies Pentecostal prayer parallels that which has typically been associated with Protestantism more generally as the individual emerges in communication with God. However, while the opportunity to express one’s personal concerns is obviously of deep significance to my informants, most of the time spent in collective-personal prayer is not spent voicing these individualised requests, but is rather given over to language that, far from being private, belongs to the entire Pentecostal community. As we turn our attention to how people learn to pray the Pentecostal way, what we will be watching for is how participation in this most important of Pentecostal practices requires more than individualised expression.

Learning to Pray the Pentecostal Way

In the early days of Pentecostal expansion in Zambia, most mainline and missionary-established denominations did not allow Pentecostal practices like collective-personal prayer, and some maintain this prohibition even today. Those who feel that collective-personal prayer is inappropriate for Christians say that it produces ‘confusion,’ a strong accusation, as this English loanword suggests that the practice is not from God (and is therefore, at least by implication, from the Devil). After all, those who take this line argue, the Bible states that ‘God is not a God of disorder but of peace’ (1 Corinthians 14: 33). Today, many traditional churches have softened their stance on collective-personal prayer. While they may not allow it during a Sunday morning service, it is permitted in other meetings – for example, those of charismatic Catholics – a shift that indexes a broader religious process of ‘Pentecostalization’ in Zambian Christianity (Cheyeka 2006). Despite its increased acceptance, however, there are certainly those on the Copperbelt who feel that collective-personal prayer has no place in Christian worship, referring to it as so much ‘noise’ (*icongo*), the sort of ‘babbling’ that Jesus warned against (Matthew 6:7).

Even in the absence of theological objections to collective-personal prayer, it takes some getting used to. Although this practice ranks highly among the things that believers say initially attracted them to Pentecostalism, most will add that they were not able to participate in collective-personal prayer right away. Indeed, many of my informants stated that they found the practice bewildering, even off-putting at first. When they initially tried it they felt embarrassed and self-conscious. It is not hard to see similar reactions written on the faces of first-time visitors to Pentecostal meetings, who sit or stand awkwardly while all

around them believers shout, clap, and sing their prayers for long stretches of time.

In my informants' accounts of learning collective-personal prayer, this practice emerges as not only strange, but also difficult. When they first started praying (i.e. became Pentecostals), they did not have the stamina of established believers, but very quickly 'ran out of words,' as they put it. In a conversation about the differences between Pentecostalism and other kinds of Christianity, Bana Chanda, who we have already met in the above discussion, told me how she learned to pray the Pentecostal way. Her experience is both representative and instructive. Bana Chanda is a Jehovah's Witness who began to attend Pentecostal meetings when she was confronted with health problems that she suspected had spiritual causes. Prior to this, she had not had any experience with collective-personal prayer, as the practice is prohibited by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

NH: ...But didn't you find Pentecostal prayer difficult at first?

BC: (Laughs) It was difficult!

NH: It was difficult? How did it seem to you (*mwalefiumfwa shani*)?

BC: Intercession seemed boring to me, as though it took a long time... They say, 'Let's pray for our parents, our families,' you pray; 'Let's pray for the elders in our church,' you pray; 'Let's pray for our children,' you pray. So, I thought it took a very long time, that they wasted time praying, praying, praying. However, after attending for a while I came to see that actually, right there in the prayer, that's where one gets power. That's where one destroys demons because as we go we are chopping them up.

NH: So, you also started to learn how to pray like that?

BC: Yes

NH: Did you know how to pray like that before you started going to the Pentecostals?

BC: No, I didn't know how to pray for myself in that way, I didn't know...

NH: So, how did you learn? Did you see how people were praying, listen to the way they prayed for themselves, and then start to copy?

BC: Yes, I started to copy (laughs)

NH: To copy, OK

BC: Yes, if we go, for example, let's say the way we go for Wednesday [prayers], if we would pray for our children, pray for our families, I

would sit quietly. I didn't know where to begin. So, just like that I started listening to the way people began praying saying, 'God!...you're the one who made the world.' You worship, you worship. So, right there, Naomi, what did I do? I copied, I copied. If they say, 'Let's pray for our ancestors, our forefathers,' I would start step by step, step by step, just like that going along and copying, just copying. And by copying like that I got used to [Pentecostal prayer].

By the time I had this conversation with Bana Chanda, I had already become familiar with narratives describing how people learned to pray, which is why I posed the question of copying so baldly. I was afraid that Bana Chanda might be embarrassed that she had copied the words of others, as doing so would effectively be to admit that she had listened in on other people's prayers – something that, at least officially, believers are not supposed to do. Upon further reflection, however, I've come to think that my efforts to help Bana Chanda save face were unnecessary. While it is true that by listening in on other people's prayers a person is going against the guidance of Pentecostal leaders, most believers recognise that this is precisely the way that the newest members of their congregations learn to pray,⁵ and I never heard anyone suggest that things should be handled otherwise.

The first thing to note in analysing Bana Chanda's account is that it is not every component of prayer that is copied. In the example she gives, Bana Chanda picks up on a phrase that has nothing to do with a fellow believer's personal petitions. Rather, she added to her own prayer a simple phrase that might be used by anyone: '... you're the one who made the world!' This pattern holds for other believers as well. Drawing on the prayers that I was able to overhear during my fieldwork, and on those I was able to record thanks to the generosity of several informants who agreed to wear lapel microphones during group prayer, I can say that most of the content of collective-personal prayer is not personal requests, but rather what might be called Pentecostal stock phrases. Believers certainly mention their children and friends by name and pray for specific problems, such as a neighbour who wants to have a baby or a son who is not doing well in school. However, they spend far more time repeating phrases like, 'Holy Ghost Fire, Holy Ghost Fire...', 'Blood of Jesus, Blood of Jesus...', or perhaps making small variations on a theme, such as, 'God of Abram, Isaac, and Jacob; God of the whole world; God of Zambia...' These expressions figure prominently in the prayers of new believers and established Pentecostals alike. While we have encountered this particular linguistic practice in a discussion of learning to pray the Pentecostal way, then, phrases like the one that Bana Chanda picked up in her early days at Higher Calling are in fact the stuff of prayer for all believers, regardless of how long they have been Pentecostals.

This mobilization of shared, relatively standardised phrases in prayer is key to the formation and composition of the Copperbelt Pentecostal person – that is, a person who prays, and prays in a very specific way. In the light of believers' accounts of their early experience with Pentecostal prayer, the most obvious function of phrases spoken over and over again is that they take up time. Learning to pray the Pentecostal way is largely a question of learning to expand

one's prayers, filling in around the relatively small space taken up by personal concerns to ensure that an individual does not run out of words, but is instead able to participate effectively in Pentecostalism's hallmark ritual practice, which can go on for hours.

In claiming that the Pentecostal person is created through the mobilization of established linguistic models, I have placed myself in familiar territory. Anthropologists have long noted that Protestant speech acts such as testimony (Stromberg 1993), confession (Pype 2011), prophecy (Csordas 1997), and witnessing (Harding 2000) are central to the process through which the Christian person is formed. Often, these practices are treated as techniques of the self, which means that the religious subject follows from linguistic performance, rather than the other way around. To invoke Susan Harding's oft-quoted phrase, for many Protestants, 'speaking is believing' (Harding 2000). While I have also argued that in using established linguistic forms people are made into Pentecostals, I want to draw a distinction between my argument here and the discussions I have just mentioned. In learning to pray the Pentecostal way, my informants are not transforming themselves through a process of identification with the particular tenets of Pentecostalism. Indeed, the content of what they say is largely irrelevant, a point that opens up a productive line of comparison.

If, as I have just suggested, the semantic meaning of what is said in collective-personal prayer is not what makes this practice significant, then we can compare it to another form of prayer in which semantic meaning does not figure: speaking in tongues.⁶ As a divine language, glossolalia is sacred because it is other and other because it is (with rare exceptions⁷) unintelligible. That is, because 'the radical otherness of the language reflects God's ultimate otherness' (Tomlinson 2014: 39), the sacred character of glossolalia stems from its 'evacuation of semantic traits' (Reinhardt 2014: 323). In contrast to the way that glossolalia evokes the otherworldly, the words we are looking at here evoke proximity. Phrases like 'Holy Ghost Fire' or 'You made the world' are well known on the Copperbelt, easily recognizable as Pentecostal speech. In addition to their conventionality, the nearness of these words also comes from their accessibility, from the fact that they are available to and used by everyone. While the strangeness and unintelligibility of glossolalia make it a symbol of the divine, the familiarity of the shared phrases used in collective-personal prayer makes these words into symbols of the collective body that produces and is identified by this language.

This observation in turn brings us to the most important thing about Pentecostal prayer for the purposes of our analysis, namely that through it a believer comes to reflect and represent the collective authors of those words – the whole Pentecostal community that surrounds her. It is this symbolic relationship of resemblance that I have in mind when I refer to individual believers as iconic representations of their communities. Just as absorbing and embodying the words of famous Pentecostal figures is meant to make believers like these 'charismatic saints' (Coleman 2009, also see Reinhardt 2014), so much so that it would be a compliment to say that a believer was a miniature version of a

powerful leader (see Coleman 2004: 436), so too absorbing and embodying words that circulate more widely in a Pentecostal congregation make a believer into a miniature representation of that community. Pentecostal words, in this case, derive their symbolic significance not from their status as specific utterances of a powerful individual, but rather from the fact that they are non-specific, shared by everyone, circulating through the whole group.

In its combination of personal requests and generic phrases, then, Pentecostal prayer has given us a model of personhood that is both bounded and permeable. Collective-personal prayer provides believers space within which to articulate their individual, private concerns, and insofar as this is the case it points us to the bounded character of the Pentecostal person. However, my informants' ability to participate effectively in this practice hinges on their capacity to absorb the language of others. In other words, the individualised aspects of Pentecostal prayer, and with them the bounded elements of the Pentecostal person, are made to depend on those aspects of Pentecostal prayer that are shared, and more specifically on the extent to which the Pentecostal person has successfully been unbounded, permeated by the language of his religious community. It is this latter element that represents most of the content of collective-personal prayer, and could therefore be said to predominate in the Pentecostal person as well, as he reflects his religious community by animating its shared language.

Having laid out the process through which collective-personal prayer makes believers into iconic representations of their communities, we can at last return to Bana Chanda's critique of Gwen. As we have seen, copying someone else's prayer is not by itself cause for censure; indeed, most prayer, including that of Bana Chanda herself, depends on language that is 'half someone else's' (Bakhtin 1981: 293). At issue therefore was not the possibility that Gwen's prayer was somehow inauthentic, but rather the particular community of Pentecostals at Higher Calling that she had come to represent. As we will see, this was a group beset by problems and tensions, which Gwen came to signify.

Trouble at Higher Calling

Over the course of my doctoral fieldwork, Higher Calling changed dramatically. When I first began to visit the group I found capacity crowds at midweek prayer meetings. Every Wednesday, dozens of people flocked to the chapel that believers had constructed behind the home of the group's founder and popular leader, a young mother called Bana Mfuwe. Pentecostal meetings almost never start on schedule, but believers hurried to get to Higher Calling on time, as latecomers could not be guaranteed a seat. It was not unusual to see people crowded at the windows during a service, craning their necks to see over the heads of those inside.

Soon after I began to attend Higher Calling I learned that Bana Mfuwe's husband had been given a job in South Africa, and that she planned to move with her children to join him there. A few months later, she left. At a farewell service, attended by well over one hundred people, Bana Mfuwe installed more than half a dozen new leaders to take her place. Among them was Bana Rachel, a fixture at

Higher Calling and a stalwart supporter of Bana Mfuwe. It seemed to me that Bana Rachel's voice was perpetually hoarse, and some people at Higher Calling said that this was because she prayed so much. At church services, her whole body was engaged in prayer and worship, and she would rock back and forth in her chair, regularly pausing to lean forward and shake her head from side to side, shuddering powerfully as if she suddenly felt a chill.

While the new Higher Calling leadership was determined that their group would not lose momentum just because it has lost its charismatic leader, it was not long before the crowds began to wane and what had been a vibrant Pentecostal fellowship quickly shrank to a handful of believers. In time, even Bana Rachel stopped attending, and there were rumours that she had started holding prayer meetings in her home, which were only open to a select few. Faced with the loss of much of her congregation, the person left in charge of Higher Calling, Bana Chilomba, pressed forward. Over time, new people began to join the group, and a few were given leadership positions. Some of these changes were controversial, however, and there was a great deal of murmuring to the effect that Bana Chilomba could not possibly fill Bana Mfuwe's shoes.

It was during this time that Gwen's prayers began to cause trouble. I was told, though I could not confirm this, that when Bana Mfuwe was still at Higher Calling she had 'chased' Gwen from the group, to use the Zambian English expression. It was only after Bana Mfuwe was long gone, and perhaps especially after attendance dropped precipitously, that Bana Chilomba invited her back. Now she was causing trouble, bringing 'confusion' with her loud prayers. It was during a series of accusations along these lines that Bana Chanda told me that Gwen's characteristic shudder was something she had copied from Bana Rachel. I never asked Gwen if what Bana Chanda said was true. To be perfectly honest, I was a bit frightened of Gwen, who would grab my hand in greeting when I saw her in the market and hold it too tightly, too long, as if to keep me from walking away. In any case, the question here is not whether Gwen was copying someone else's prayers, but rather why the possibility that she had done so would be cause for criticism. If, as I have shown, the fact that people copy other believers when they are learning to pray is just one example of a larger pattern in which everyone is using everyone else's words all the time, then the fact of copying as such ought not to present much of a problem. Why, then, did Bana Chanda include in her list of grievances against Gwen the fact that she had copied Bana Rachel?

In a discussion of Pentecostal practice in the United States, Christopher Dana Lynn (2013) describes an instance in which a person was deemed to be speaking in tongues not through the power of the Holy Spirit, but rather through the 'wrong Holy Ghost' – that is, through the power of the Devil. In the Pentecostal context in which this event took place, the linguistic and kinetic markers of demonic and divine glossolalia are often indistinguishable. Believers therefore place a great deal of emphasis on 'discernment,' a complex idea that includes not only spiritual sensitivity but, crucially, a keen awareness of social dynamics. In Lynn's analysis, the wrong Holy Ghost emerges in a particular relational context – in this case, in the tensions between a woman accused of demonic glossolalia

and a congregation in which she was marked as an outsider. Discernment therefore 'requires idiosyncratic information' about 'the religio-familial dynamics of a respective church' (Lynn 2013: 241), an understanding of both local expectations about religious practice and the relational world of a congregation.

Taken together, Lynn's observations and the above discussion of collective-personal prayer provide us with the necessary tools to understand Bana Chanda's criticism of Gwen. What was at issue in this case was not sincerity or authenticity, but rather the state of the community that Gwen's prayers had come to represent.⁸ Perhaps especially because they bore a resemblance to a respected leader who many believed had abandoned the group to start a fellowship of her own, Gwen's prayers – forged in the context of a community that was breaking apart – symbolised frustration and pain. As such, Gwen came to stand for everything that was wrong with Higher Calling at the time. Little wonder she was the target of criticism.

Conclusion: Personhood, Performance, and Pentecostal Values

In this article I have examined how the Copperbelt Pentecostal person is created through prayer. As the language of collective-personal prayer becomes a believer's own, she is increasingly able to participate in this paradigmatic ritual practice. In other words, by taking on the words of others she becomes someone who prays, and in so doing becomes a Pentecostal. The Copperbelt Pentecostal person is therefore in large part a product of the prayers of others, of 'the accumulated efforts of men and women,' as Mauss put it so long ago (2003: 33). While the bounded, individualised understanding of personhood so often associated with Protestantism is not excluded from this model, it is clear that learning to pray the Pentecostal way entails a great deal of permeability. In the context of collective-personal prayer, people become Pentecostals only by successfully absorbing and animating, in Goffman's sense, the words of others. Importantly, this process also makes a believer into an iconic representation of his community. As we have seen, this is not always a pleasant or positive thing. Pentecostal churches and fellowships on the Copperbelt, like many Protestant groups the world over, regularly become sites of tension, schism, and breakdown. Because the individual believer comes to symbolise his community, he can come to represent what is broken about that community, whether he intends to or not.

While this analysis has helped us understand Bana Chanda's critique of Gwen, it has also raised a number of other issues that I have not had space to take up here. In closing, allow me to briefly address just one of them. Although the din created by collective-personal prayer makes it difficult to make out what any one person is saying, the fact that someone is praying – and often praying with a good deal of intensity – is nevertheless plain to see. A similar point can be made about the early-morning prayers of my neighbour, which, while ostensibly private, were readily apprehensible by a range of over-hearers. This brings us to the question of audiences (see Haynes forthcoming). While the primary audience for a believer's prayers is God, it is likely that he is not the only one at

whom Pentecostal prayer is directed. The process of learning to pray the Pentecostal way is very much a social process of self-presentation, as effective performance of collective-personal prayer signals an individual's piety to other believers. While Pentecostals are certainly looking for a bit of privacy as they bring their concerns to God, they might just as well be seeking the attention of, to invoke Goffman again, intended over-hearers (cf. Robbins 2001).

All of this has implications for the issue at the heart of this volume, namely the social life of prayer. Simply put, collective-personal prayer promotes a particular kind of sociality in which display is central (also see Haynes 2012). In the broader relational context of the Copperbelt, external markers of advancement are extremely important. This is because of the significance my informants attach to what they call 'moving,' an animating idea that structures much of Copperbelt social life – in other words, a key local value. There are multiple gradients along which moving is measured, but for Pentecostals the most important of these is often spiritual. A believer can be said to be moving if she displays the signs of increased charisma. In the light of the fact that someone with a great deal of charisma is referred to as someone who 'prays hard' (*alapepesha*), it is not difficult to see the role that prayer plays in establishing that someone is moving. Given the centrality of prayer in Pentecostal practice, it could hardly be otherwise.

Seen from this angle, iconicity takes on a slightly different meaning, one that returns us to the individualised aspects of Pentecostal person. My thought here follows Nancy Munn's (1986) now-classic discussion of value on Gawa. In Munn's analysis, certain actions – often, ritual actions – make people into icons of key Gawan values, thereby rendering values 'experientially available' (Munn 1986: 271). In the case of the Copperbelt, a person who embodies moving in his increased charisma, a person who 'prays hard,' could be said to be an icon not only of his community, but also of moving itself.⁹ In this way, the individual may be especially well defined, and this may in turn invest the individualising aspects of Pentecostal personhood with particular significance. In this brief discussion of moving, as in the above analysis, there is far more to a fellow Pentecostal's evaluation of a believer's prayer than the issue of whether or not it is sincere. Paying attention to the symbolic quality of prayer has allowed us, in the spirit of Mauss, to situate them in social practice, and in so doing to understand a bit of the social life of prayer on the Zambian Copperbelt.

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Notes:

¹ In this article, I use the feminine prefix 'Bana' to indicate a teknonym; here, Bana Chanda is Chanda's mother. All names are pseudonyms.

² Nsofu (also a pseudonym) is a township with a population of approximately 25,000 people located on the outskirts of the city of Kitwe, the commercial and transportation hub of the Copperbelt.

³ A point that, again, Mauss anticipated, when he observed that all societies were characterized by both individualism and communism. In the light of this observation, the task of the social scientist here was simply to find 'their proportions' (Allen 1985: 38), a task that finds fuller expression in Dumont's work.

⁴ What I mean by the term 'community' is flexible. This could be a congregation, fellowship, or something broader. In offering this open-ended definition, my aim is primarily to reflect the experience of my informants, whose membership in particular Pentecostal groups is prone to change, and who also frequently attend more than one Pentecostal group at a time.

⁵ In addition to listening to what those around them were saying, new believers are sometimes advised to use existing texts like the Lord's Prayer or passages from the Bible to supplement their prayers when their own words ran out.

⁶ I should note that on the Copperbelt believers, especially laypeople, do not often speak in tongues in the classic Pentecostal sense. Indeed, speaking in tongues is, at least in some congregations, rare enough to warrant comment when it occurs, and some of my informants have expressed a degree of anxiety about glossolalia.

⁷ The exceptions here are xenoglossia, or divinely inspired speech in a human language of which the speaker has no knowledge, and instances in which another person is given the interpretation of tongues through divine inspiration. I have never witnessed either of these events on the Copperbelt.

⁸ Although it is worth noting that what Bana Chanda said that Gwen had copied from Bana Rachel was not language per se, but rather bodily movement, I do not think that this undermines my argument. The point is that the individual

capacity for Pentecostal prayer is created through the embodied incorporation of other people's prayers. While I have focused here on speech rather than on bodily movement, a similar case could be made along those lines, as raising or clapping hands, pacing, or kneeling are also practices that represent familiar markers of Pentecostalism that are province of the entire group.

⁹ Munn's analysis also stresses the role of the body in this process, and in this respect the example of prayer is again illuminating, as we have already seen how success in prayer depends on a believer's ability to absorb, animate, and embody the words of those around her.

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